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BLOODY SUNDAY

A Spy Thriller, Money Games and Assorted Celebrities

by CHARLES CHAMPLIN

The international collaboration of Pierre Salinger, who evidently does most of the plotting in Paris, and Leonard Gross, who does the bulk of the writing in California, has produced a second thriller featuring Andre Kohl. Kohl, who like Salinger is a Paris-based American television correspondent, made his debut in "The Dossier," and the events in **Mortal Games** flow from it.

Leonard Gross and Pierre Salinger

Someone attempts to assassinate Kohl at a farewell dinner in his honor at the Ritz; he has decided to turn in his trenchcoat. Later, on a tropical island, the assassins try again and nearly succeed, grievously wounding Kohl and his new bride, whose father runs the CIA.

It is the interesting if farfetched conceit of the story that Kohl, given a new face, voice, body, manner and life history, is hired to find his own assassins and in the process re-woos the wife who is about to bear their child. Even his bride has been led to believe he is dead; only the villains know better and stalk the new man Kohl has become.

The back plot—who hired whom to do what and why—is suitably knotty, ultimately involving extremists on both sides of the Iron Curtain. At times, the authors attempt to lay a Le Carre seriousness on some quite post-Bondish goings-on. But the local colorings in Paris and elsewhere are authentic (the authors are both veteran reporters), and thrillers seldom feature such an affecting love story.

A *tour de force* is like jazz; you may not be able to define it but you recognize it when you meet it. Thomas Perry's **Island** is indisputably a *tour de force*, an antic, unconventional, unpredictable, witty and surprising tale of a husband-and-wife team of con persons who find a shallow offshore shoal in the Caribbean and pour enough junk on it to create an artificial island. They give it nationhood and make it a haven for tax dodgers, money launderers and other sly operatives from the world over.

Harry and Emma are grand company, and it is impossible not to root for their devilish enterprises. Those who admire the riotously imaginative works of Peter Dickinson and Richard Condon will feel right at home with Perry's artful dazzler.

Earl W. Emerson is a lieutenant in the Seattle Fire Department and draws on what he knows best to make a high-combustion thriller in **Black Hearts and Slow Dancing.** His hero is a fireman in a backwater Washington town, recovering from emotional storms elsewhere. He is talked into being sheriff temporarily and gets involved in a brutal murder case with links to the Seattle Fire Department, of all institutions.

Emerson's style is muscular and active. There's a melodramatic rooftop finish, and it's always a pleasure to read an author who is indubitably authoritative.

Mysteries strewn with real celebrities, the living and the dead, appear to be a trend, not invariably a happy one and not my cup of cocoa, I've discovered. But Elliott Roosevelt's tales starring his mother Eleanor Roosevelt as an inadvertent sleuth are written with such affection as well as such ingenuity that they are an exception to prove a rule.

Murder at the Palace, the fifth in the series, finds Mrs. R. on a wartime visit to London, staying temporarily at Buckingham Palace. (That much is true history.) In one of the other apartments a singularly unpleasant English chap who is one of the king's equerries is done to death while a half-dozen suspects await him in the drawing room. One of the suspects is the head of Scotland Yard, but Mrs. R. knows better and goes swiftly to the heart of what is really a locked-room mystery.

Novelist William Harrington is thanked for "invaluable assistance" to the author. Whoever finally put pen to paper has achieved a warmly satisfying story.

Helen Hayes is credited as co-author of **Where the Truth Lies,** with Thomas Chastain presumably functioning as the writer who took notes and created the story. It involves the stabbing of an unadmired producer, on stage during

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Helen Hayes

the finale of the Academy Awards and in full view of the world. The central figure is a New York stage actress named Halcie Harper, who occasionally does films in Hollywood and who can obviously use Miss Hayes' towels.

There are occasional asides that sound as if Miss Hayes might well have said them. But these are not quite enough to sustain a rather tritely mechanical plot, which is not helped by the overtones of exploitation.

Raymond Chandler, one of the definers of the private eye genre, becomes the detective in Gaylord Larsen's **A Paramount Kill.** Unfortunately, the characterization centers on the reports of Chandler's tormented and alcoholic last years. Billy Wilder, William Dozier and other real figures from the studio's past are in view, not overly beguiling either. The plot has echoes of "Chinatown," but nothing can overcome the unpleasant feeling that what we have here is a posthumous invasion of Chandler's privacy, at no real gain.

On the strewing of celebrities: Jean Harlow drags Charlie Chaplin to the center of the floor and cries, "Let's show 'em how to dance!" during a star-studded, death-marred party tendered by William Randolph Hearst for Marion Davies in Robert Lee Hall's **Murder at San Simeon.** Louella and Cary are there, along with several fictional characters, including an illegitimate child. Hearst himself is the sleuth, and it is all unreal and uninviting in about equal measure, not least because the reader feels like a voyeur in a wax museum, waiting in vain for the figures to come alive.

Stuart Kaminsky brings the real Peter Lorre and several dozen imitators on stage in his mystery, set in 1942, **Think Fast, Mr. Peters,** Peters being Kaminsky's private eye, Toby Peters, who is even further down at the heel than most fictional eyes. At least Lorre is sympathetically portrayed and could pass for a genuine human being. Kaminsky also has a gift for inventing comic characters and nutty situations (who is knocking off the Lorre doubles?). He is good reading, if his sheer narrative energy doesn't exhaust you.

Antonia Fraser, the excellent biographer of Mary Queen of Scots, returns with her sixth thriller, **Your Royal Hostage,** featuring television personality Jemima Shore. Here Jemima is helping some brashly incompetent American television visitors cover the royal wedding of a princess and a notorious playboy. (It sounds vaguely more appropriate to Monaco.)

Some fervent animal-rights people plan to kidnap the princess to publicize their cause. (The plotters are wonderfully evoked, right out of "The Lady Killers.") Things get out of hand, but neither Jemima nor anyone else works up much of a sweat, although Lady Antonia's familiarity with royal protocol is entertainingly deployed and so is her amusement at the American infatuation with royalty.

MORTAL GAMES
by Pierre Salinger and Leonard Gross (Doubleday: $17.95; 319 pp.)

ISLAND
by Thomas Perry (G. P. Putnam's Sons: $18.95; 336 pp.)

BLACK HEARTS AND SLOW DANCING
by Earl W. Emerson (Morrow: $17.95; 274 pp.)

MURDER AT THE PALACE
by Elliott Roosevelt (St. Martin's: $15.95; 233 pp.)

WHERE THE TRUTH LIES
by Helen Hayes and Thomas Chastain (Morrow: $16.95; 215 pp.)

A PARAMOUNT KILL
by Gaylord Larsen (Dutton: $16.95; 215 pp.)

MURDER AT SAN SIMEON
by Robert Lee Hall (St. Martin's: $18.95; 343 pp.)

THINK FAST, MR. PETERS
by Stuart Kaminsky (St. Martin's: $15.95; 198 pp.)

YOUR ROYAL HOSTAGE
by Antonia Fraser (Atheneum: $15.95; 228 pp.)

The Epic Poet of Rock Criticism

PSYCHOTIC REACTIONS AND CARBURETOR DUNG
by Lester Bangs
(Knopf: $19.95; 377 pp.)

Reviewed by Kristine McKenna

The name Lester Bangs is unknown to the general reading public, but to those who write about rock music, it's nothing short of legendary. Uneven, willfully perverse and self-involved to the point that he occasionally threatened to disappear into himself, Bangs was nonetheless one of the few rock critics who managed to elevate this vilified form of prose into the realm of literature.

Employing popular culture as a launching point for impassioned discourses on the essential moral conflicts that plague the human race, Bangs' best writing had the epic scope of a great novel, and his accidental death five years ago of a drug overdose at age 34 ended a career of great promise.

This collection of pieces dating to 1971 is welcome but is also something of a disappointment. The book was edited by rock scholar Greil Marcus, a man lauded as a genius by some, dismissed by others as a crank egghead who grows ever more enmeshed in increasingly labyrinthine theories charting popular culture.

One can only wonder what his thinking was in the editing of "Psychotic Reactions," which includes a few woefully weak pieces while omitting some of Bangs' best work (his brilliant writing about Miles Davis, for instance).

Even at his worst, Bangs was head and shoulders above the rest of the pack. Well-read and intellectual (qualities he downplayed in his writing), Bangs was an anarchist afflicted with a crippling sensitivity that left him torn between empathy and rage. A hands-on journalist who dove into his assignments with the zeal of Hunter S. Thompson, Bangs maintained a thoughtful detachment that made him capable of sociological theorizing that Tom Wolfe would envy.

Bangs as a sociologist further outdistances Wolfe—who grows increasingly snooty and judgmental—in the generosity of spirit that informed everything he wrote. A raving populist who loathed the elitism of the privileged as much as he hated the ignorance of the *lumpen* prole, Bangs ultimately empathized with everyone—and in a sense, that may be what killed him. He was incapable of distancing himself from the pain he saw all around him.

A notoriously self-destructive substance abuser, Bangs was reportedly feeling optimistic and in better shape than he'd been in in years at the time of his death. Bangs' friend and fellow critic, Richard Meltzer, however, sees things differently and describes this book as being about "Lester's wish to die."

The weight of Bangs' unbearable alienation does grow increasingly oppressive as the book progresses, and the final chapters are downright grim. There's none so bitter as the disillusioned idealist, and Bangs was nothing if not an idealist. He expected a lot out of life, and he gave a lot back. Some of the great things he gave can be found in this book.

McKenna writes about popular culture for the Los Angeles Times Calendar.

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